

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 708

By Lamberth

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend the University of Tennessee Volunteers football team on the completion of an outstanding season and victory in the 2020 Gator Bowl.

WHEREAS, this General Assembly is pleased to recognize those gifted student athletes who represent this State's flagship university with the greatest ability and humility both on and off the gridiron; and

WHEREAS, led by head coach Jeremy Pruitt, the University of Tennessee (UT) Volunteers football team finished 8-5 in 2019, wrapping up the season with a thrilling 23-22 come-from-behind victory over Indiana in the 2020 TaxSlayer Gator Bowl in Jacksonville, Florida; and

WHEREAS, the Vols scored two touchdowns in a 30-second span to erase a 13-point deficit in the fourth quarter, becoming the first FBS team this season to win a game after trailing by 13 or more points in the final five minutes; teams were 0-471 in that scenario entering the Tennessee-Indiana matchup; and

WHEREAS, freshman running back Eric Gray was named the 2020 TaxSlayer Gator Bowl Most Valuable Player after he scored the game-winning touchdown, recovered the game-changing onside kick, and finished with 120 all-purpose yards; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee finished 5-3 in Southeastern Conference (SEC) play and capped the season with six consecutive victories; and

WHEREAS, UT will enter the 2020 season with the nation's second-longest win streak, trailing only LSU, the winner of the College Football Playoff National Championship; and

WHEREAS, after beginning the season 1-4, Tennessee won seven of its final eight games, only losing to then-number-one Alabama on the road during this season-defining stretch; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee's defense allowed only 334.5 yards per game, its best performance in a decade; the Vols ranked in the Top 20 nationally in both pass defense and interceptions; and

WHEREAS, led by All-SEC First Team honorees, junior offensive guard Trey Smith and senior safety Nigel Warrior, five Tennessee players collected All-SEC accolades, the most since 2012; and

WHEREAS, Trey Smith returned from a career-threatening injury to lead the Vols to a successful finish and was named one of three finalists for the Jason Witten Collegiate Man of the Year Award; and

WHEREAS, off the field, a school-record four players collected CoSIDA Academic All-District honors: Brandon Kennedy, Ryan Johnson, Matthew Butler, and Paxton Brooks; and

WHEREAS, twelve Vols graduated in December, including Brandon Kennedy and Riley Lovingood, who earned master's degrees before playing in the Gator Bowl; and

WHEREAS, the Vols were led by their five senior captains, as voted on by the players: wide receiver Jauan Jennings, wide receiver Marquez Callaway, safety Nigel Warrior, linebacker Daniel Bituli, and linebacker Darrell Taylor; and

WHEREAS, Jauan Jennings finished his collegiate career ranked in the top five in Tennessee history in career receptions (146), receiving yards (2,153), and touchdowns (18); and

WHEREAS, Marquez Callaway captured All-SEC Second Team honors as a punt returner and finished with six touchdown catches; and

WHEREAS, Nigel Warrior finished third in tackles on the Vols' defense with seventy and tied for first in the SEC in interceptions (four) during the regular season; and

WHEREAS, Daniel Bituli collected All-SEC Second Team accolades and became only the second Vol to ever lead the team in tackles during three consecutive seasons; and

WHEREAS, Darrell Taylor finished second in the SEC in sacks (8.5) in 2019 and wrapped up his career ranked tenth in Tennessee history with 19.5 sacks; and

WHEREAS, junior kicker Brent Cimaglia collected All-SEC Second Team honors after making the third-most field goals in Tennessee history (23) and all of his extra points (35); and

WHEREAS, several true freshmen made an immediate impact for the Vols in 2019, led by linebacker Henry To'o To'o and left tackle Wanya Morris, who each earned Freshman All-American and SEC All-Freshman Team honors; and

WHEREAS, freshman running back Eric Gray rushed for 246 yards against Vanderbilt in the regular season finale to record the fifth-best performance ever by a Tennessee running back and the best rushing game ever by a Tennessee true freshman; and

WHEREAS, redshirt junior quarterback Jarrett Guarantano regained his starting job down the stretch and battled back from a broken wrist to lead the Vols on their season-ending win streak, finishing the season with 2,158 passing yards and sixteen touchdowns; and

WHEREAS, Jarrett Guarantano captured SEC Offensive Player of the Week honors and became only the third Vol quarterback ever to pass for 400 yards in a win at Missouri that clinched Tennessee's first bowl berth since 2016; and

WHEREAS, Jauan Jennings, Marquez Callaway, and junior Josh Palmer each eclipsed 100 receiving yards in the Missouri game, marking the first time in Tennessee history that three different receivers amassed at least 100 yards; and

WHEREAS, the Vols' six-game win streak capped by a victory in the Gator Bowl certainly makes their fans optimistic about the 2020 season, when UT seeks to return to its rightful place among SEC royalty; and

WHEREAS, like its outstanding football program, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) is a public institution in which all Tennesseans can take great pride; and

WHEREAS, while celebrating 225 years of education, research, and service to the State this year, UTK is also educating more students, conducting more life-changing research, garnering more support, and connecting with more Tennesseans than ever before; and

WHEREAS, UT has the highest graduation rate among public universities in the State, with seventy-two percent of students graduating in six years and a record fifty-four percent graduating in four years; and

WHEREAS, ranked among the top fifty public universities by *U.S. News & World Report*, UT has many top-rated programs, including graduate programs in nuclear engineering, printmaking, acting, information sciences, nursing, and social work, and a supply chain management undergraduate program; and

WHEREAS, a land-grant university committed to discoveries that advance science and better our understanding of the world, UTK received a record \$260 million in competitively funded research last fiscal year for more than 1,000 new and existing projects; and

WHEREAS, UT is a dynamic economic engine that makes a \$1.7 billion impact on Tennessee's economy and generates \$166 million in State and local tax revenue; and

WHEREAS, the Volunteers are true football heroes to their loyal legion of fans, and their tenacity in redeeming their 2019 season is worthy of awe and approbation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor and commend Coach Jeremy Pruitt and the assistant coaches, staff, and players of the University of Tennessee Volunteers football team on the completion of an outstanding 2019 season, pay tribute to their thrilling come-from-behind victory in the 2020 Gator Bowl, and extend to each of them our best wishes for even greater success next season.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.